

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Grant Completion Report

Grant Information

Title: Exploring issues of inclusion and access in the Department of Physics and Engineering

Abstract: Diversity and inclusion have long been a concern of the physics community, yet it is still a struggle to recruit and retain talented young scientists from a range of diverse backgrounds. Recently, professional organizations like the American Institute of Physics (AIP) and the American Physical Society (APS) have taken a more proactive role in drawing attention to these issues and providing a framework for progress to be made. At West Chester University, the Department of Physics and Engineering has begun to work on this issue by forming a Department Action Team (DAT). The DAT will think locally while being informed by nationally best practices. The DAT is composed of four physics faculty, a staff member from admissions, a representative from the Deans office, and three current physics students. Over the next year, the DAT will meet biweekly for an hour at a time in addition to completing tasks outside of meeting times. In this grant proposal, we are requesting student wages to support the efforts of the three students serving on the DAT. Their voices are critical to the process and their work should be compensated.

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Additional Co-Director Contact Information: Matthew Waite, Chair of the Department of Physics and Engineering

Priority Goal Areas-(WCU Strategic Plan Goals; Capacity-Building Goals; and ODEI Strategic Initiative Goals)

WCU Strategic Plan Goals:

Goal 1 -LEARN IT: INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS -Create and enhance opportunities to build self-awareness, knowledge and skills to interact effectively with aspects of diversity, inclusion, culture and global differences.

Goal 2 -LIVE IT: PROMOTE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT -Promote a welcoming and inclusive university environment by demonstrating a commitment to the principles of diversity and inclusion in all interaction.

Grant Outcomes

We successfully formed a group of faculty, students, and staff who met once every 3-4 weeks to discuss equity and inclusion in the Department of Physics and Engineering. The students' voices played a critical role in the group and informed the decisions made. The work of the students was supported by this grant. As a group, we read relevant material, discussed possible actions the Department could take, prioritized those actions, and have now begun the work of making change happen.

An example of this process is shown in the Figure 1 graphic. This graphic is the product of a meeting in which we brainstormed actions items for the group and attempted to prioritize the action items based on their potential impact and ease of implementation.

Some concrete actions items that occurred during this grant were:

- Student members (**supported by this grant**) reviewed anonymous exit surveys from students who left the major. They presented their findings to the larger group. They suggested (1)

normalizing the challenges students experience early in the program; (2) provide first- and second-year students with more opportunities to engagement with the Department community (3) revise exit survey; (4) create a peer mentoring system.

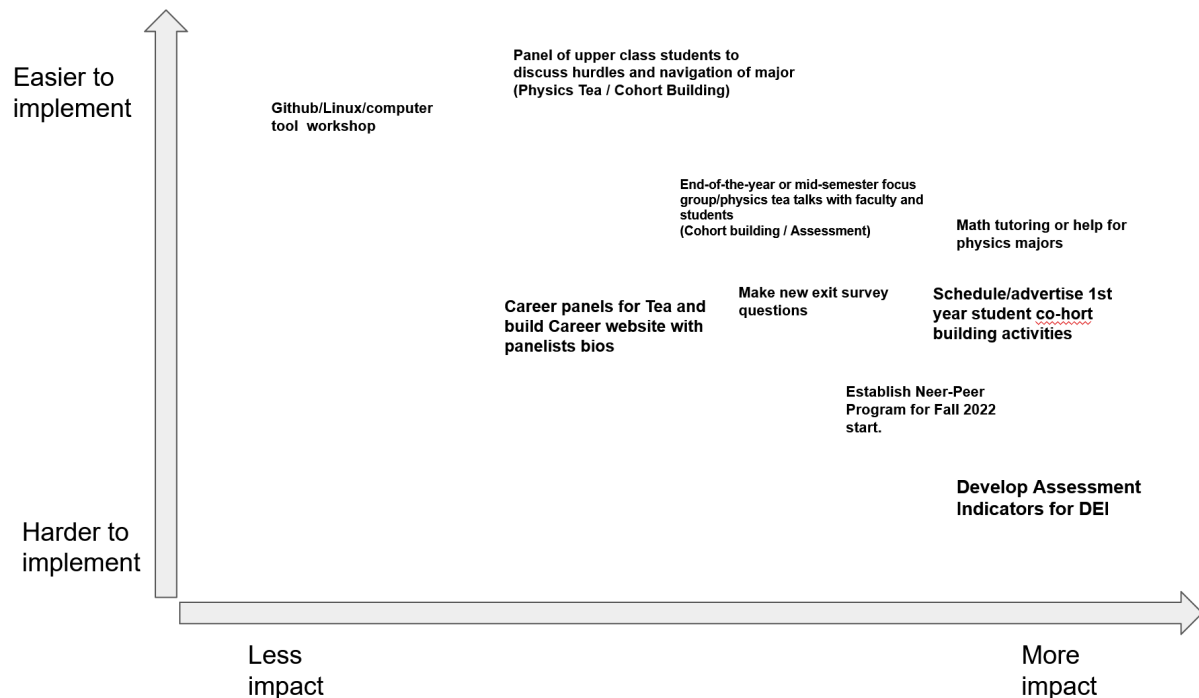


Figure: Example of a slide that the group created to prioritize action items.

- A faculty member and a student (**supported by this grant**) facilitated a meeting between students and faculty in the Department to discuss the ‘department climate.’ The students in attendance appreciated the space to inform the department of their concerns.
- A faculty member and a student (**supported by this grant**) develop a near-peer mentoring program for students joining the Department (as first-years, change-of-majors, or transfer students). The student working on this action item had a positive experience with the DMC peer-mentoring program and applied that knowledge to the creation of this new mentoring program. The mentoring program is currently active and being utilized for the first time this summer for incoming first-year students.
- Faculty and students (**supported by this grant**) discussed the creation of a permanent DEI committee in the Department. The group worked collectively on a mission statement for the committee. The mission statement has been finalized and is awaiting approval from the Department.
- Faculty collected input from students (**supported by this grant**) on revising the department webpage to make it more inclusive. The feedback was forwarded to the Department webmaster to be considered during the rebranding occurring at WCU.

Leveraging the efforts of this group, we are now seeking to form a permanent DEI committee in the Department. This work would not have been possible without the work of the **students supported by this grant**.